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ABSTRACT

Self-esteem may be an issue for certain minority groups more than others. In particular, given their long and difficult history, this issue may be of more relevance to minorities of African-American descent. To assess whether renewed signs of racism at a college were negatively affecting the self-esteem of African-American students the Race Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS) was administered to 22 African-American college students and 35 Euro-American college students. While no intra-racial sex differences occurred, all cross-racial comparisons were highly significant. Relative to whites, blacks did not have lower self-esteem. Moreover, blacks were comfortable with their racial identity and did not evidence any racial self-hatred or self-denigration. Their significantly higher scores on the encounter and initialization scales of the RIAS indicates that while these students are encountering new racial experiences, they are able to comfortably incorporate these experiences into their self-concept. More interesting is the significantly higher score of African-American students on the immersion-emersion scale. The higher scores on this scale indicates the students' acceptance of, and interest in, their racial heritage. However, it also indicates anger. This anger may reflect students' response to the renewed racism on college campuses. Such racism is not causing blacks to reject their racial heritage, but is creating anger at those who question the legitimacy of minority students. (ABL)

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Self-Esteem and Anger Among African-American Students

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Abstract

To assess whether renewed signs of racism at our college were negatively affecting the self-esteem of African-American students, we administered the Race Identity Attitude Scale to 22 African-American (10 women and 12 men) and 35 Euro-American students (16 women and 19 men). While no intra-racial sex differences occurred, all cross-racial comparisons were highly significant. Relative to whites, blacks did not have lower self-esteem. Moreover, blacks were comfortable with their racial identity. But, they were angry. African-American students did not react to racism with self-denigration. Rather, they expressed anger at those who question their legitimacy.

Self-Esteem and Anger Among African-American Students

Being minorities ourselves, the authors have sporadically wondered whether we are exceptions to the common notion that, relative to Euro-Americans, minorities have lower self-esteem. We have not felt the struggles of self-hatred or experienced regret for not being white. But, perhaps this is because we are of Asian and Hispanic origin. Different minorities have different struggles, and self-esteem may be a more critical issue for certain groups than for others. In particular, given their long and difficult history, this issue may be of more relevance to minorities of African-American descent.

Recent signs of renewed racism on college campuses may add to this history. For example, on our campus the school newspaper has seen an influx of letters criticizing our affirmative action admissions policy. And, such criticism has surfaced in computer newsgroups. The explicit concerns are about issues of fairness, but the implicit message is that less qualified (i.e., inferior) minorities are being admitted over more highly qualified whites. This implication has affected the students' perceptions of minorities on campus. And, it may have affected the self-perceptions of the African-American students themselves.

In order to study this latter possibility, we used Parham and Helms' (1981) Racial Identity Attitude Scale (RIAS) to assess the self-perceptions of both African-American and Euro-American students. The RIAS was developed to assess four of the five stages of what William Cross (1971) termed the "negro-to-black conversion experience." These are hypothetical stages which delineate the psychological transformation of African-Americans from self-rejection to positive acceptance of their racial identity. Parham and Helms, however, recommend that the RIAS be used as a measure of four different racial attitudes towards the self rather than as a measure of the various stages of psychological development. It is within this latter context that we used the RIAS.

The four racial attitudes assessed by the RIAS are pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion and internalization. Pre-encounter attitudes involve an Euro-American frame of reference wherein African-Americans supposedly behave in ways that devalue their black identity. Encounter attitudes occur when the individual has experiences which challenge this frame of reference and makes him or her more open to his or her African-American identity. In immersion-emersion the individual develops a sense of "black pride," which corresponds to increased involvement in African-American groups and activities. However, with this

increased pride, comes a denigration of the white culture and its people. Finally, with internalization the individual achieves a feeling of inner security as the immersion-emersion experiences becomes incorporated into his or her self-concept. This security allow ideological flexibility and causes a decline in strong anti-white feelings.

Method

Apparatus

In order to assess these four attitudes among our students, we selected a 34-item version of the Racial Identity Attitude Scale. The RIAS asks subjects to use a five-point scale to indicate their level of agreement/disagreement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to statements pertaining to racial self-perceptions. Since the RIAS was developed for use with African-American subjects, two forms of the Scale were used: the original form for African-American students and a revised form reworded to be applicable to Euro-American students. In essence we "turned the tables" by using a scale developed for minorities with a majority population. Normally, the reverse is true.

Subjects

In terms of our subjects, we knew that random sampling would net us almost none of the very few African-Americans on our 16,000 student campus. Thus, acknowledging questions

about representativeness, we obtained our African-American sample by surveying members of the the African-American Student Association. We also administered the RIAS to students in a course on ethnic diversity. In total we were able to obtain 12 African-American males and 10 African-American females. To obtain a comparison sample of Euro-American students, we administered the RIAS to a class in Introductory Psychology. Since all students are required to take this course, we feel that the 16 Euro-American women and 19 Euro-American males in this group may be reasonably representative of the University's majority population.

Results

An initial statistical comparison was made to examine any possible sex differences within each racial group. Comparisons across the four attitudinal scales between Euro-American males and Euro-American females and between African-American males and African-American females revealed no significant sex differences (all t's < 1.75, all p's > .05). Thus, within each race, female and male subjects were combined for further analyses.

Cross-racial comparisons of the combined groups showed highly significant differences on each of the four attitudinal scales. Blacks were significantly lower than whites in terms of pre-encounter attitudes ($t(54) = 6.50$, $p < .001$). And, Blacks

were significantly higher in terms of encounter ($t(55) = 7.60$, $p < .001$), immersion-emersion ($t(54) = 7.44$, $p < .001$), and internalization ($t(55) = 8.77$, $p < .001$). The results for these analyses are shown on Table 1. Whatever attitudes whites and

Table 1
Cross-Racial Comparisons Across the Four Scales of The Racial Identity Attitude Scale

Attitudinal Scales:	Pre-Encounter	Encounter	Immersion Emersion	Internalization
Blacks (n = 22) Means:	16.0*	17.3*	28.2*	53.9*
Whites (n = 35) Means:	26.8*	9.9*	16.7*	40.2*

*$p < .001$

blacks may hold about themselves, such attitudes appear to differ significantly across the races.

Discussion

The significantly lower score for African-Americans on pre-encounter attitudes provides evidence contrary to the common notion that blacks have lower self-esteem. Pre-ecounter attitudes involve a devaluation of one's race, and these students do not evidence any racial self-hatred or self-denigration. Moreover, their significantly higher scores on the encounter and internalization scales indicate that, while

these students are encountering new racial experiences, they are able to comfortably incorporate these experiences into their self-concept.

Most interestingly, however, is the significantly higher score of African-American students on the immersion-emersion scale. Immersion-emersion attitudes are associated with both an increased involvement in one's heritage and a denigration of the white culture. The higher score on this scale indicates the students' acceptance of, and interest in, their racial heritage. But, it also indicates anger. And, this anger may reflect the students' response to the renewed racism on college campuses. Such racism is not causing blacks to reject their racial heritage, but is creating anger at those who question the legitimacy of minority students.

In reaching these conclusions, we want to make it clear that our sample is limited to black college students and not to blacks in general; the high levels of self-esteem evident in this sample may be a correlate of college entrance. Furthermore, the sample is small and the findings may be specific to our campus. Still, given recent racial tensions and the riot in Los Angeles, the findings seem worthy of further exploration.

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